

## I-40 project called 'high priority'

**By Nick Trougakos Staff Writer**

Construction of a new Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway will likely be a "high priority" for federal transportation officials, U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta said Tuesday.

Mineta, visiting Oklahoma City on Tuesday along with Federal Highway Administrator Mary Peters, said the poor condition of the current I-40 Crosstown Expressway warrants federal attention.

"This ought to be considered as one of our high priority projects," Mineta said of the plan to reconstruct a sevenmile stretch of the interstate at a cost of \$350 million.

More than \$100 million has already been secured by the state for the project. The \$250 million still needed — roughly the equivalent of the state's yearly transportation budget — may start to materialize soon, U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook said.

"I think you'll begin to see the first congressional action toward the funding within the next month," said Istook, R-Warr Acres. Istook, chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over transportation spending, has led efforts to increase federal funding for the new roadway. Mineta said it could take several years before the project is fully funded. "Because of the size of the program, it probably won't be able to be funded in one year," he said. "It would have to be apportioned over several years." The section of the interstate being replaced was designed to carry up to 72,000 vehicles a day. Usage is about 113,000 motorists each day, and a crumbling underside reflects the strain, transportation officials say. Istook said construction could take upwards of five years once funding is obtained, but didn't give a date when he thought work could start. Mineta and Peters toured Interstate 44 in Tulsa earlier in the day, where state officials are hoping to undertake a widening project on at least one curvy section of the freeway. Gov. Brad Henry said the presence of Mineta and Peters was a positive for the state. "Their being here is a commitment to help us with our vital transportation needs," he said.



Norman Mineta